

23 Pentecost 2019

Oh God, we are your imperfect servants. May we, in our imperfection always follow the path that you have set before us. May we always strive to love as you love. Amen.

If you have a cellphone or computer of any kind, you have been exposed to and use certain apps. Some apps come already installed and if you are like me, you do not delete them because, after all, they must be there for a reason, **even** if you never use them. Best I can tell, is that there must have been about 50 apps on my computer, when I bought it, most of which I have not opened. If you have started to use apps such as Facebook, google, GPS on your phone, or Twitter, you will have been faced with the dreaded 'I agree' box that states you have read the terms and agreements prior to using the program. It is on most every single app you ever try to use. Your choice is to decline, which means you can't use the app or program, or you actually take the time to read it, or you simply check the box so you use Facebook, your phone, or play a game. Why is this the case? Supposedly, your mobile app needs a Terms and Conditions section to stop abusive users, terminate access, or accounts at their sole discretion, and enforce rules and guidelines that they set. It's the set of rules that users must follow, to access, use, and continue to use their app.

According to an article written for EFF, which is a nonprofit that defends digital privacy, free speech, and innovation:

"Requiring the user to click "I Agree," after calling attention to the terms and affording the user an opportunity to review them, demonstrates the user agreed to the terms. However, courts generally do not require that you actually have read the terms, but just that you had reasonable notice and an opportunity to read them".

So, checking the box is a legal contract whether you read it or not.

Other websites have written language that say you agree to their terms simply by using their website. However, that language may be hidden somewhere in the website itself and is not always enforceable in courts.

I think that at some level, we all know this to be true, but how many of us actually read all of the documentation before we start using a program on the computer? And even if we do, do we understand it? One person actually counted all of the words in the terms of agreement for Facebook. There were 3,300 words in their terms and conditions. The best I could tell was that if you violate some part of the agreement, Facebook could ban you for life. And yes, there are some of you here that would say, "Good riddance". Honestly, some of this is important to know and most of us don't.

For example, Netflix accepts no liability for improper access to your personal information. They say that unfortunately, no security system can be guaranteed to be 100% secure. Accordingly, they cannot guarantee the security of your information and cannot assume liability for improper access to it. I imagine that this would include credit card information. That can be a very big deal. Will this stop many of from using Netflix? Probably not.

Although maybe I should, I do not plan to go back and read every term of agreement for every program that I use. I tend to live dangerously that way. That and buying food that is marked down on the same day that it is supposed to expire. Call me a rebel.

To change gears just a little, consider the Christians of the church in Thessalonica to whom Paul is writing in today's epistle reading. Did they know the Terms & Conditions of the faith they had embraced? At some point in time, I am sure they must have been offered an "accept" or "decline" option. They checked the "accept" box and now here they were: a religious minority in Thessalonica with a misunderstanding about something really, really

major: The second coming of Jesus Christ. As we discussed last week, the Thessalonians thought he was coming soon — like any time. Like don't bother to start the dishwasher soon.

In Thessalonica, and many other places, some people wanted to stamp out the new faith, and there were no limits to what they would do. It could be overwhelming. Under severe pressure, new Christians and even experienced Christians, might give in and abandon their faith to save their lives or the lives of their families.

1 Thessalonians 3:2-4 “We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God's service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them. 4In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that **we would be persecuted**. And it turned out that way, as you well know”. It is thought that the persecution came at the hands of the Jewish leaders. But the who is not so important as the fact that they **were** persecuted. The first book of Thessalonians was written approximately in A.D. 51. Paul wrote the second letter to the Thessalonians approximately a year or so after the first one. Yes, Roman power and influence was becoming more prominent and less than 20 years later, Jerusalem would be totally destroyed in AD 70. According to Paul, the new converts were indeed warned of what would follow their acceptance of Jesus.

Let's go back to the early gospel accounts which describe the call to discipleship. In Matthew (4:19), for example, Jesus invites Simon and Andrew with the words, “Follow me,” and the writer reports that “immediately they left their nets and followed him.” There is nothing to indicate that terms and conditions of the calling were spelled out. Jesus called and the disciples followed.

The takeaway for us could be whether we accept or decline the Terms & Conditions that Jesus Christ lays out before us, and whether we fully understand those conditions.

The call in this text, one that echoes Jesus' call to the Galilean fishermen, is to follow him. We can and have done this, but do we accept the conditions that come with that call? Do we even know what they are? And if we do, are we still willing to follow, surrender all, and not count the cost?

I usually respect the well-known theologian, Winnie the Pooh, who once said; "Don't underestimate the value of doing nothing". But we all need to do something when it comes to being a follower of Jesus.

This past week we celebrated Veteran's Day. It has been said that the "land of the free" is the promise; and the "home of the brave" is the cost. If our land is to be free and whole, then there is a cost - the cost of bravery, the cost of sacrifice. If it can be right in some instances to give up one's life for one's country, then how much more right can it be, to sometimes give up one's reputation for the church, or to give up one's career for the church, or to give up one's life for God? Do we know what we agreed to when we agreed to follow Jesus? What is the cost of discipleship?

Tony Campolo tells the sad story from his high school days of how he failed to truly be a Christian. There was a boy in his class named Roger. Roger was gay. Everyone knew and tormented him for it. They heaped verbal and even physical abuse upon him. One day the abuse reached a crescendo. Five of boys dragged Roger into the shower room, shoved him into the corner and urinated all over him. Around two o'clock the next morning Roger went down to the basement of his house and hung himself.

When they told Tony, he says he realized he wasn't a Christian. He knew all the right answers and sincerely believed all the right things and had lots of good moral practices. But Tony didn't live faith out when it came to Roger. If he had he says he would have stood up for Roger when the others were mocking him, he would have been a friend, and just maybe, Roger would still be alive today. {Source; Reported in Tony Campolo, Let Me Tell You A Story}

Why do we fail to live out the terms and conditions of our Christianity? There can be a myriad of reasons, all of which I have been guilty of at one time or another. It can be out of embarrassment, a fear of being ridiculed, alienated, of being physically or emotionally hurt, losing family or friends, or possibly, the difficulty of being able to accept someone who is not like ourselves. I know that I have been in situations where I needed to speak up against an injustice, but for some of the reasons I just listed, I didn't. Therefore, I cannot judge anyone else. There is no such thing as a Cookie-cutter Christian. We may be all followers of Jesus, but we live out that way of life the best that we can, in our own way. Yes, someday, we will all stand before Jesus to be judged for the things that we did here on earth. But as we all know, because we say the Prayer of Confession every Sunday, that we will also have to explain why we did not do what we **should** have done.

For those who feel that they are not able or not worthy enough to do the work of God, to be God's light in the darkness, I offer this story which I found:

"What sort of person does God use? Imagine a group of people gathered before you. You need to select from among them those most likely to play a pivotal role in God's plans for humanity. They are so at ease with you that they open up and share their darkest secrets. One tells you that after a night of heavy drinking he was sexually abused by one of his own sons. Another confesses that he gave his wife to another man to sleep with. Yet another

plotted with his mistress to kill her husband. Another murdered a man and is still on the run from the law. One is a prostitute. Another has a lifestyle marked by violence – he even killed people to impress a girlfriend and his prospective father-in-law. Yet another confesses that he cheated his brother out of his inheritance.

Could you use them? I hope so, for they are the heroes of faith described in Hebrews 11.

Noah is the man who got drunk and was sexually abused; Abraham is the man who gave his wife to sleep with another; David is the one who plotted to have his mistress' husband killed. Moses is the one who murdered an Egyptian and was never brought to account for it. Rahab was the prostitute. Samson is the man whose life was marked by violence and who killed to impress his girlfriend. Jacob is the person who cheated his brother out of his inheritance". Source: Scott Higgins

God uses flawed people every day. My friends, whether or not you feel that you really **never had** a chance to carefully read over the terms and conditions of following Jesus at your baptisms, there has certainly been ample opportunity to do so since.

Very little that we do inside these walls is going to bring folks through those doors. Our place of harvest, is out there. Part of our terms and conditions as Christians is to be the light of Christ out in the world. That is where we have been placed to do God's work. What that looks like is different for each one of us. It is not easy, but nothing ever worthwhile is. The reward however is out of this world.

Amen